



Spring Issue
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The Pearl Preview

Dear Area 2 Conservationists:

The grass surrounding us begins to take on its beautiful green color, the flowers begin to bloom and the air is filled with the beautiful smell of jasmine—all these things serve as a constant reminder that spring is here. I am quite sure all of you are excited about the upcoming spring and summer, but I would be remiss if I didn't look back at the challenges and accomplishments you made in Area II this past year.

As each of you are aware, we have been tremendously shorthanded due to personnel retirements and promotions to other positions within several clusters throughout the area. When this occurred Area II employees as usual, as they are accustomed to doing, answered the call of duty when asked to fill in. This was truly a result of TEAM WORK.

The Area II team has never failed to meet the goals and expectations of our client base; we have always delivered the goods! Area II employees, like none others in the state, have risen to the major occasion and have withstood the challenge. With this I am very thankful. As we enter the halfway point of this fiscal year, we can not rest on our laurels, we must continue to strive to be our very best as we work to conserve our most treasured resources for future generations that will follow us. Again, words can't express my gratitude for all that you do for your constituents in your counties, and with the conservation movement in our great state of Mississippi.

David Brunson
Acting Area Conservationist



David Brunson
Acting Area Conservationist

75
Years

A Legacy of Conservation
Helping People Help the Land





ACES Employees Provide Technical Assistance to NRCS and Small Farmers

Story and Photos by Judi Craddock

On a very cold and windy day in January, I had the opportunity to spend time with ACES Employee and former State Soil Scientist Mike Lilly who has been hard at work during the winter and spring months boring for pond sites, assisting in conducting wetland determinations, conducting soils workshops, and performing the year long Rapid Carbon Assessments (RCA), a scientific study to find out how much carbon is in the soil in the United States. On this particular day he was assisting Dwight Jackson, Kemper County Soil Conservationist, in boring holes to establish recommendations for four pond sites.

Soil Conservationist Dwight Jackson in Kemper County ((DeKalb); ACES Employee Mike Lilly; and Willie Cole, Noxubee County small farmer, are pleased with the results of the soil boring for a new pond site.



Kent Macon, another small farmer in Noxubee County, is shown observing Mike Lilly and Dwight Jackson. Dwight is using the GPS system on Mike Lilly's cell phone to label the exact coordinates of the pond site.. Mike has the "Soil Web" application on his (personal) phone that allows him to pull up soils descriptions on the internet, a new tool he is having "way too much" fun with. He has determined the soil to be Leeper soil which has good characteristics for a pond.

Special thanks go to Dwight Jackson and Mike Lilly for their time and patience with me on the COLDEST day in January!!

Willie Cole, a minority small farmer in Noxubee County, has applied for Pond (practice code 378) for livestock watering. He and his brother, Elvert, own the land which consists of pastureland and timber. Mike Lilly, after boring the soil for testing, recommended the site for a pond as the soil was determined to be Leeper soil. Leeper soil is common in Noxubee County which is very good for sustaining a pond, but the county also has some Demopolis soil which is too shallow and therefore not suitable. Determining the correct soil type and pond site is critical for the success of ponds holding water for livestock watering.

Mr. Kent Macon, another minority small farmer who has 25 acres, signed up for grass planting (practice code 512) to plant fescue; fencing (practice code 382); Cogangrass spray (practice code 595); and now a new pond for watering livestock. All of these practices come under EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program) practices and are pending approval.



Cattle shown on Kent Macon's small farm. Dwight Jackson is quoted saying, "Land in this county is better suited for livestock, pasture, and holding the world together!"

ACES Employees Provide Technical Assistance to NRCS and Small Farmers—Continued

(Story and Photos by Judi Craddock)



In contrast to the coldest day in January on page 2, a beautiful sunny day in mid-February was selected as the day to join Matt Spann, State Administrative Officer in the State Office; Mike Lilly, ACES employee in the Pearl Area Office; and Randy Kimble, ACES employee in the Hazlehurst Field Office, on a trip to Copiah County to personally observe ACES employees at work. Mike and Randy were boring holes on potential pond sites for four Copiah County landowners. *Shown above*, Mike and Randy examine a site that was determined not to be suitable for a pond—the soil was mapped as Providence and was too sandy, not enough clay to hold water. The land belonged to Mr. Royste Gustavis, a socially disadvantaged

minority farmer. A suitable core trench could not be constructed because the site was too sandy, therefore not recommended for a pond.



Randy Kimble explains to us about the problems the landowner would have with the amount of slope present on this site including a lot of extra excavation for a levee.



Matt Spann tries her hand with the auger—an exciting and most welcome day of field experience away from the office!



Mike Lilly and Randy Kimble give Matt Spann a lesson in soils and what characteristics are needed to hold water for a pond.



ACES Employees Provide Technical Assistance to NRCS and Small Farmers—Continued

(Story and Photos by Judi Craddock)



Three ACES employees together—Mike Lilly, Judi Craddock, and Randy Kimble discuss the “ribbon effect” (shown below) that demonstrates the clay content of the soil. Photo by Matt Spann.



The “ribbon effect.”



Mike Lilly examines the soil at this site on Mr. Milton Craig’s land, a socially disadvantaged farmer who is applying for a pond through the EQIP program. The soil is Guyton, and ground water was coming up through the bored hole, plus there was a nearby stream, all which will add to the excavated pond staying full. The site was recommended suitable for a pond.



Randy bored the hole for this site and holds up the auger to show Guyton soil. The soil sample was showing more moisture as the hole got deeper, indicating ground water which would be good for an excavated pond.



These two ACES employees make a great team! Here Randy bores holes on John McCardle’s farm in Copiah County. The soil is Providence with a perched water table at 30 inches. The site will make a good location for a pond.

Noxubee County Landowner Finds Farming is the Best Lifestyle for Over 50 Years

Story and Photos by Judi Craddock

Meeting a very nice lady such as Mrs. Annie Brooks was the highlight of my day in early February. (She was so gracious even when I entered her spotless home with my muddy boots!) A long-time native of Noxubee County, she and her husband of 35 years own 40 acres of farmland consisting of crops (mainly cotton), cattle, and grassland. Although they are not cropping at this time, they still have a few cows and horses. The land has been in her husband's family for over 50 years. As a grandmother she also keeps her home and raises two grandchildren, as well as farming a huge vegetable garden.



Mrs. Annie Brooks, Noxubee County small farmer and landowner, highly recommends NRCS. She appreciated their friendliness and willingness to assist her family with various EQIP practices.

She recalls that she heard about the Natural Resources Conservation Service by word of mouth and decided to call the Noxubee County Field Office. At that time she talked to Larry Hardy, former Supervisory District Conservationist, who was "so very nice and talked about available EQIP programs."

Since that time she first called NRCS, she has signed up and been approved for several EQIP practices including pond, livestock watering, and fencing, and today she was applying for another pond.

We wish the Brooks family much success in their future endeavors and look forward to serving them again..



Mrs. Annie Brooks and Soil Conservationist Dwight Jackson. Dwight has been providing excellent assistance to Mrs. Brooks and helping her with signing up for needed EQIP practices on the Brooks' Farm.



Fairport (Historical) Community, Noxubee County, MS.



The cattle shown here are standing too deep in mud while feeding—an illustration of heavy use area. Picture by Dwight Jackson.

Mississippi's Smith County Earth Team Volunteers— “The Key Foundation of Conservation”—Photos Courtesy of Debbie Smith



Debbie Smith, pictured in dark blue, along with a few volunteers prepare food at a conservation field day.



Earth Team Volunteers serve as teachers at Youth Conservation Field Days held in Smith County every year.

The NRCS theme for this year's National Volunteer Week (April 10-16, 2011) is *“Earth Team Volunteers—The Key Foundation of Conservation.”* Smith County Earth Team Volunteers demonstrate this theme quite well! A tremendous amount of service comes from this special group of education and conservation minded individuals who not only freely give their valuable time and talents to the Smith County office, but are constantly busy setting the standards high for what can be accomplished by volunteers. They are also teaching invaluable lessons to the youth of this county who will soon be our future leaders and natural resource conservationists!

Just ask District Clerk Debbie Smith and Supervisory District Conservationist Ron Read, and you will hear astounding stories about the contributions of the Smith County volunteers. To name a few, they serve as helpers during the annual tree planting week every February; help coordinate and lead in youth conservation field days throughout the year; participate and assist at special events such as last year's 75th Anniversary of NRCS celebration that was held at the Natural Science Museum, assist in farm safety days throughout the county, and help host annual area and county meetings.



Those serving as teachers provide invaluable learning experiences for the youth conservation field days.



A “small” gathering of Smith County volunteers at an Appreciation Luncheon held on April 14, 2011, during National Volunteer Week—there are a total of 72 very active Earth Team Volunteers in the county. Six National Guard volunteers could not be there due to being deployed to Afghanistan, eight Mississippi Forestry Commission and four U. S. Forest Service volunteers could not be there due to prescribed burning and other work responsibilities. An awesome group of dedicated folks! Photo courtesy of Sherry Soelman, News Reporter, Smith County Reformer.

Mississippi's Smith County Earth Team—"The Key Foundation of Conservation" (Continued)

Mississippi holds a yearly Envirothon competition in which these volunteers serve as priceless teachers and workers to make sure the event is successful. Smith County will also be hosting the annual area MACD Summer Meeting in which their volunteers provide assistance from everything to registration to providing and serving food. As Debbie Smith puts it, "Smith County Earth Team Volunteers are the BEST VOLUNTEERS EVER!"



Smith County Earth Team Volunteers enjoy their annual Tree Planting Week preparing bundles of trees for the public.

A group of youth take a rest during a conservation field day in which volunteers helping with various activities throughout the day.



Rankin County SWCD Annual Meeting



*Left: Murray Fulton introduces the guest speaker.
Right: Kurt Readus and E.J. Tynes enjoy the fellowship and interesting speaker.*



Rankin County Soil and Water Conservation District presented their annual meeting on April 7 featuring guest speaker, Kelli Jackson with Congressman Alan Nunnelee's office, and a delicious catfish dinner with all the trimmings. The meeting was well attended as usual!

Guest speaker Kelli Jackson receives a plaque from Murray in appreciation of her speaking at the Rankin County SWCD annual meeting.

Rapid Carbon Assessment

*Courtesy of Chris Hatcher and Mike Lilly
Photos by Kelvin Jackson*

What is the Rapid Carbon Assessment (RCA)?

The RCA is a scientific study to find out how much carbon is in the soil in the United States. The amount of carbon in the soil affects crop yields. It also affects how well the soil can support wildlife. It may be important to global climate change.

Who is doing the Rapid Carbon Assessment?

The U.S. Government, specifically, the Soil Survey Division of the United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service. In the southeastern part of the country, the lead scientist is James Mason.

How are they doing it?

Soil scientists will take measurements at about 6,500 locations across the country. At each location, they will dig five small pits in an area about 125 feet across. Four of the pits will be about 2'x2'x2'. One of the pits will be about 4'x8'x6'.

The locations are confidential. The scientists will not collect information about who owns the land.

When is it being done?

Rapidly. They have already started. They plan to collect all of the data by the end of next summer (2011).

Why should I care?

The RCA will help us to understand how carbon in the soil relates to land management. The knowledge should help with conservation planning. Ultimately, it should help protect the land. The study will also provide accurate, factual information to help understand global climate change.

How can I help?

If you are asked, give permission for the scientists to work on your land. They will need to be on your property for one or two days. They will be polite guests and will clean up after themselves.

Who do I call for more information?

Christopher Hatcher, phone number is (662) 422-7975. His e-mail address is chris.hatcher@ms.usda.gov.

Mike England of NRCS in Wisconsin,
Mike Lilly and
Chris Hatcher
take
measurements
and soil
samples.



Mike Lilly uses his new cell phone to search for soils data on his "Soil Web" application .



Kelvin Jackson does his share of the digging!



Lignite was found in one of the pits that was dug. This is the product that MS Power will be mining in Kemper County.

Camp Binachi Boy Scout Camp Prescribed Burning, Lauderdale County—Photos by Kelvin Jackson



John Reeves, Will Colvin, Wade McDonald, and Jeff Smith prepare for the day. Notice Jeff has on snake chaps—wonder why?



Drip torch fuel—50/50 diesel and gas.



Will Colvin using drip torch to start the back fire.

As I have stated before, pictures are worth a thousand words! In early April, the East Mississippi Choctaw Area Council's Camp Binachi Boy Scout Camp conducted a Prescribed Burning (Practice Code 338) on the camp as a part of the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). NRCS in Lauderdale County was able to provide cost-share assistance to the Council through the WHIP program.

The reason for the burning was to eradicate or reduce competition of undesirable, invasive species that compete for water, light, and nutrients. Benefits include recycling of nutrients to make them easier to be absorbed by plants, increased diversity of plants thus promoting more food opportunities for wildlife, and reduction of fuel load and fire hazard. Undesirable species include Sweetgum, Privet hedge, Yaupon, Chinese Tallow or Popcorn tree.

Species or ecosystems benefited include bobwhite quail, Bachman's sparrow, cottontail and swamp rabbits, eastern wild turkey, red-cockaded woodpecker, gopher tortoise, several guilds of forest song birds, and longleaf pine forests. Camp Binachi is striving to reforest longleaf pine through assistance from the NRCS Lauderdale Field Office. Kelvin Jackson, Supervisory District Conservationist, and staff continue to provide assistance to Camp Binachi.

For further information, please contact your local USDA Service Center or visit our website <http://www.ms.nrcs.usda.gov/>



Prescribed fire brings out all different types of wildlife, even the unexpected—a rattlesnake! He's just as friendly as a lap dog!???



Fire burning at different rates of intensity.



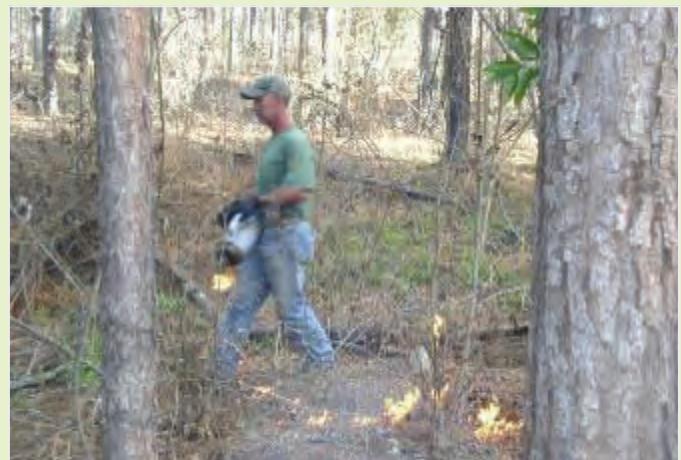
Monitoring the fire to ensure it doesn't get out of control.



Jeff Smith, Forester, keeps an eye on the fire.

Camp Binachi Boy Scout Camp Prescribed Burning (Continued)

Photos by Kelvin Jackson



Wade McDonald setting the pull strip to add additional safety buffer for the back fire.



Fuels being consumed by fire.



Results of a well executed prescribed burn.

Miscellaneous News and Pictures



Mike Lilly, ACES Employee; and Dr. William (Bill) Kingery, Professor of Plant and Soil Science Department, Mississippi State University; have been providing soils training at the Brandon Field Office this spring. Emphasis was given on boring for ponds and making recommendations to landowners whether or not the soil is suitable for a pond, and/or suggesting alternative solutions such as heavy use area or watering trough for livestock that would provide

adequate water supply. Having proper documentation of our recommendations to the landowners was also emphasized. *Pictured left: Mike Lilly; Right: Dr. Bill Kingery receives a plaque of appreciation from Shannon McCarty (photo by Heather Cook).*



Shannon McCarty explains to the soils group how important it is to be accurate and cautious when advising landowners to build a pond or not since they are actually “spending the landowner’s money” when recommending a pond.



Conservation...love it, live it, teach it

This is the theme for the upcoming **Environmental Workshop for Teachers** to be held 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. in Rankin County on June 8-10, 2011, at the Community Center Spillway Road; and in Simpson County on June 15-17, 2011, at Rex Broadhead Lodge.

Experience: Water Quality, Forestry, Soils, Native Plants, Outdoor Classrooms, Litter Reduction and Recycling, and Hands-on Activities. Sponsors are USDA-NRCS, Central MS RC&D, MS Department of Environmental Quality, Pearl River Valley Water Supply District, MS Wildlife Federation, and Rankin and Simpson Counties Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

For more information contact Harriet Lowe at 601-540-1033 or harriet.lowe@ms.usda.gov



Jason Keenan, Featured NRCS Employee



On April 12, Jason Keenan, Area Wildlife Biologist, made the nightly news on WAPT-TV in Jackson regarding an incident of nearly 100 catfish, bass and bream found dead in a pond at Strawberry Patch Park, a seven-acre city park in Madison, MS. The incident caused quite a stir from Madison Parks Director Vern Booth and other city officials and concerned citizens. Some thought perhaps someone had put some type of chemical in the lake to kill the fish.

Jason, who was not expecting to be on camera or interviewed for TV, was approached after being called to the site where he examined the fish and pond area. After careful examination, he explained to the officials that this happens on lots of ponds in the southeast and in Mississippi. The fish kill was caused by several factors—mainly loss of oxygen in the pond. Another reason he found was the over population of fish. He recommended the city aerate the pond such as a fountain in the middle, hopefully preventing another incident such as this. He also determined that the water was safe and the fish were okay to eat.

Congratulations, Jason, for on the spot NRCS technical assistance!



Strawberry Patch Park, a beautiful seven-acre city park, used for fishing and recreation, located in Madison, MS.



We will miss you, Ramsey!

Dear NRCS Friends;

I have enjoyed the past 10 years working with y'all to deliver NRCS initiatives in Area 2. The connections of people to land oftentimes exceeded mere commodity values, and that's the take-home message most remembered. NRCS personnel are hard-working and extremely dedicated, able to leap tall, last-minute deadlines in a single bound, and Mississippi's natural resources are much better for it. Thank y'all!

Recently, I accepted a managing editor role in a small, brand-new magazine called Mississippi Land & Lodges (www.landandlodges.com), a position that resonates perfectly with the specialized travel service www.GetDucks.com, and seasonal, conservation easement-related consultations. It will be a big but welcomed change of pace, and it would be a lie to say I'm less than excited.

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Thank y'all for everything, especially your hospitality.

Best regards,

Ramsey Russell





"Whatever you do, Randy, do NOT let go of that wire!"



I know
China is
down there
somewhere!



Area 2 and Rankin
County SWCD
welcome Heather
Cook, the new District
Clerk for Rankin
County. Welcome
Heather!



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Strawberry Spinach Salad

Ingredients:

2 Tablespoons sesame seeds
1 Tablespoon poppy seeds
1/2 cup white sugar
1/2 cup olive oil
1/4 cup white or balsamic vinegar
1/4 teaspoon paprika
1/4 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
1 tablespoon red minced onion
10 oz. fresh spinach—rinsed, dried, torn into bite size pieces
1 quart strawberries—cleaned, hulled and sliced
1/4 cup almonds, blanched and slivered



Options: Use walnuts instead of almonds, add bananas and/or blueberries.

Directions:

- In a medium bowl, whisk together the sesame seeds, poppy seeds, sugar, olive oil, vinegar, paprika, Worcestershire sauce, and onion. Cover and chill for one hour.
- In a large bowl, combine the spinach, strawberries and almonds. Pour dressing over salad and toss. Refrigerate 10 to 15 minutes before serving.

Serves 4. Printed from Allrecipes.com

